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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1844

INFO AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 USNATO 2730

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1

TAGS: PINT PFOR UR UK

SUBJ: SHELEPIN'S DEPARTURE FROM THE POLITBURO

AT MAY 13 POLADS, UK REP CIRCULATED FOLLOWING UK ANALYSIS.

BEGIN TEXT:

SHELEPIN'S DEPARTURE FROM THE POLITBURO

1. THE ANNOUNCEMENT ON 16 APRIL THAT THE CPSU CENTRAL COMMITTEE'S PLENUM HAD RELIEVED A N SHELEPIN OF HIS DUTIES AS A MEMBER OF THE POLITBURO "IN CONNECTION WITH HIS REQUEST" WAS TOTALLY UNEXPECTED. IN THE ABSENCE OF ANY ADDITIONAL EXPLANATION (EG SHELEPIN'S STATE OF HEALTH, HIS TRANSFER TO ANOTHER JOB, OR THE NEED FOR HIM TO CONCENTRATE ON HIS TRADE UNION ACTIVITIES) IT GAVE RISE TO INTENSE SPECULATION ABOUT THE REASONS FOR THIS SUDDEN OPENING OF THE SOVIET LEADERSHIP'S RANKS AND SHELEPIN'S EQUALLY ABRUPT DEPARTURE FROM THEM. VARIOUS THEORIES HAVE BEEN ADVANCED, SOME MORE PLAUSIBLE THAN OTHERS, BUT NONE OF THEM BASED ON SUFFICIENT EVIDENCE TO PROVIDE A REALLY CONVINCING ANSWER. TAKEN TOGETHER THEY SEEM TO CONSTITUTE TWO SEPARATE SCHOOLS OF THOUGHT; THE ONE BASED ON SHELEPIN'S MOTIVES FOR WISHING TO RESIGN FROM THE POLITBURO, THE OTHER ON HIS COLLEAGUES' MOTIVES FOR WANTING

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TO GET RID OF HIM. THERE HAVE ALSO BEEN ATTEMPTS TO PROVIDE A SYNTHESIS OF THE TWO.

2. THE FIRST AND "PERSONAL" LINE, WHICH SEEMS TO HAVE BEEN DEVELOPED IN MOSCOW ALMOST AS SOON AS THE ANNOUNCEMENT WAS

MADE (AND COULD WELL HAVE ORIGINATED WITH THE KGB OR THE SOVIET TRADE UNION HEADQUARTERS) WAS THAT THE STATEMENT SHOULD BE TAKEN AT ITS FACE VALUE, IE THAT SHELEPIN DID ACTUALLY REQUEST TO BE RELIEVED OF HIS POLITBURO MEMBERSHIP. SO FAR, THERE HAVE BEEN TWO VERSIONS OF HIS ALLEGED MOTIVES FOR DOING SO:

(A) THE IGNOMINIOUS THREATMENT HE RECEIVED IN BRITAIN (DURING HIS VISIT AT THE INVITATION OF THE TUC) AND THE PERSONAL ATTACKS ON HIM IN THE BRITISH PRESS, AGAINST WHICH HE HAD BEEN DEFENCELESS, HAD MADE HIM DESPAIR OF HIS FUTURE AS A POLITICAL LEADER WITH A ROLE TO PLAY IN THE WEST;

(B) HE HAD BEEN SO INCENSED BY THE FIASCO OF HIS VISIT TO BRITAIN THAT ON RETURNING TO MOSCOW HE HAD DEMANDED:

(I) A FULL-SCALE INQUEST INTO WHAT HAD GONE WRONG;

(II) AN OFFICIAL, HIGH-LEVEL PROTEST TO THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT;

(III) THE RECALL OF THE SOVIET AMBASSADOR IN LONDON; AND THAT WHEN NONE OF THESE WAS FORTHCOMING, SHELEPIN HAD OFFERED TO RESIGN FROM THE POLITBURO WITHOUT SUSPECTING THAT HIS OFFER WOULD BE PROMPTLY AND DECISIVELY ACCEPTED BY HIS COLLEAGUES.

3. THE FIRST VERSION WAS ADVANCED (PERHAPS DISINGENUOUSLY) IN THE TIMES ON 17 APRIL (IE THE DAY AFTER SHELEPIN'S "RE-SIGNATION" WAS ANNOUNCED). THIS MAY HAVE BEEN PURVEYED BY THE SOVIET DISINFORMATION SERVICES TO COUNTER THE OBVIOUS CONCLUSION, WHICH WOULD BE DRAWN IN THE WEST THAT SHELEPIN HAD FALLEN VICTIM TO A POWER STRUGGLE IN THE KREMLIN. THE POINTS IN (B) ABOUT THE SOVIET FAILURE TO PROTEST ABOUT SHELEPIN'S TREATMENT, AS WELL AS SHELEPIN'S CALCULATED RISK IN OFFERING TO RESIGN, WERE PUT FORWARD SIMULTANEOUSLY BY THE TIMES AND THE GUARDIAN A WEEK LATER, ON 23 APRIL. THE STORIES ABOUT THE POST-MORTEM AND SHELEPIN'S ALLEGED ATTEMPT TO MAKE THE SOVIET AMBASSADOR THE SCAPE-GOAT FOR HIS ABORTIVE VISIT TO BRITAIN APPEARED IN THE DAILY MAIL.

4. THE SECOND, "POLITICAL" LINE, FAVOURED BY THE GREAT MAJORITY OF WESTERN COMMENTATORS, IS BASED ON A CONJUNCTURE OF FACTORS INCLUDING:

(I) ELEMENTS OF A POWER STRUGGLE WITHIN THE POLITBURO
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PROVOKED BY SHELEPIN'S ASPIRATIONS TO SUCCEED BREZHNEV AS GENERAL SECRETARY AND HIS POSSIBLE MANOEUVRES DURING THE SEVEN-WEEK PERIOD FROM THE END OF DECEMBER TO MID-FEBRUARY WHEN BREZHNEV WAS APPARENTLY OUT OF COMBAT FOR MOST OF THE TIME;

(II) POSSIBLE DIFFERENCES OF APPROACH BETWEEN BREZHNEV AND SHELEPIN CONCERNING SOME ASPECTS OF SOVIET DETENTE POLICIES;

(III) HIS INCREASING ISOLATION FROM HIS FORMER POWER BASES IN THE KOMSOMOL AND KGB;

(IV) THE FAILURE, IN PUBLIC RELATIONS TERMS, OF HIS MISSION TO BRITAIN (AS OF HIS PREVIOUS AND ALMOST CLANDESTINE VISITS TO WEST GERMANY) WHICH DEMONSTRATED THAT HE WAS, WITH HIS KGB PAST, CLEARLY UNSUITED TO ACT AS AN EMISSARY TO THE

WEST, PARTICULARLY IN CIRCUMSTANCES OF DETENTE AND GROWING
EAST-WEST TRADE UNION CONTACTS.

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5. WHICHEVER FACTOR WAS THE IMMEDIATE ONE IN PRECIPITATING SHELEPIN'S DOWNFALL, THERE SEEMS LITTLE DOUBT THAT HIS DEPARTURE FROM THE POLITBURO WAS ENGINEERED MAINLY BY BREZHNEV HIMSELF WHO HAD SUCCEEDED BEFORE, IN THE MONTHS FOLLOWING KHRUSHCHEV'S OVERTHROW IN 1964, IN COUNTERING SHELEPIN'S RIVALRY AS CONTENDER FOR THE TOP JOB. HE MANAGED TO DEPRIVE SHELEPIN SUCCESSIVELY OF HIS POSTS AS DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER, CHAIRMAN OF THE PARTY-STATE CONTROL COMMITTEE AND CENTRAL COMMITTEE SECRETARY, AND SHUNTED HIM OFF IN 1967 INTO THE CHAIRMANSHIP OF THE CENTRAL COUNCIL OF TRADES UNIONS (AT THAT TIME REGARDED AS A POLITICAL BACKWATER). THE LATTER MOVE FOLLOWED STRONG RUMOURS THAT SHELEPIN (LIKE HIS PROTEGE, EGORYCHEV) HAD DEMANDED A MORE FORWARD MIDDLE EAST POLICY AT THE TIME OF THE SIX DAY WAR. HIS CONTINUING MEMBERSHIP OF THE POLITBURO THROUGHOUT THE FOLLOWING EIGHT YEARS REMAINED SOMETHING OF AN ANOMALY AND PRESUPPOSED THE VESTED INTEREST OF HIS COLLEAGUES IN KEEPING HIM THERE AS A COUNTER-WEIGHT TO BREZHNEV'S INCREASING PRE-EMINENCE. ONCE, HOWEVER, IT BECAME LIKELY THAT BREZHNEV'S AGE AND DECLINING STATE OF HEALTH MIGHT PREVENT HIM FROM HOLDING THE OFFICE OF GENERAL SECRETARY FOR MORE THAN ANOTHER YEAR OR SO, AND THAT THERE WAS A VERY REAL POSSIBILITY THAT SHELEPIN WOULD ONCE AGAIN MAKE A BID TO SUCCEED HIM, THOSE WHO ALSO SAW THEMSELVES IN THE RUNNING AS BREZHNEV'S CHOSEN SUCCESSOR PRESUMABLY JOINED
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FORCES AROUND BREZHNEV IN ORDER TO GET RID OF SHELEPIN AS

SOON AS POSSIBLE BEFORE PREPARATION OF THE 25TH PARTY CONGRESS BEGAN. (THERE MAY BE SOMETHING SYMBOLIC IN THE FACT THAT THE DATE OF THE CONGRESS WAS ANNOUNCED, UNUSUALLY EARLY, ON THE SAME OCCASION AS SHELEPIN'S "RESIGNATION" TOOK PLACE.)

6. THE THEORY THAT SHELEPIN MORE OR LESS VOLUNTEERED TO RESIGN CANNOT HOWEVER BE ENTIRELY EXCLUDED, EVEN THOUGH HIS RELATIVE YOUTH (AT 56, HE WAS THE YOUNGEST MEMBER OF THE POLITBURO), HIS UNDOUBTED AMBITION AND ORGANISING ABILITY, AND HIS REPUTED OPPORTUNISM MAKE THIS SEEM VERY MUCH OUT OF CHARACTER.

WHETHER SHELEPIN WAS LED INTO A TRAP OVER HIS VISIT TO BRITAIN, OR WHETHER THE TRAP WAS LARGELY OF HIS OWN MAKING, THE VISIT COULD NOT HAVE FAILED TO HAVE REPERCUSSIONS. CERTAINLY THE FAILURE OF HIS COLLEAGUES TO BACK HIS DEMAND FOR A PROTEST, IF HE MADE ONE, WOULD HAVE MADE HIS POSITION IN THE POLITBURO INTOLERABLE. AND THE FACT THAT NO PROTEST WAS MADE ANYWAY WOULD HARDLY HAVE MADE IT MORE COMFORTABLE. IN THIS CONNECTION IT IS WORTH NOTING THAT WHEN THE SOVIET AMBASSADOR DELIVERED ON 4 APRIL A PROTEST ABOUT THE BEHAVIOUR OVER THE LAST FEW MONTHS OF DEMONSTRATORS OUTSIDE THE SOVIET EMBASSY AND ABOUT AN ALLEGED ASSAULT ON ONE OF HIS STAFF DURING THE DEMONSTRATIONS AGAINST SHELEPIN, NEITHER HE NOR THE NOTE MADE ANY SPECIFIC COMPLAINT ABOUT THE RECEPTION GIVEN TO SHELEPIN WHILE HE WAS IN BRITAIN; INDEED, SHELEPIN WAS NOT MENTIONED BY NAME.

7. IT IS STILL TOO EARLY TO SAY, HOWEVER, WHETHER SHELEPIN HAS YET BEEN "UNPERSONED" ALTHOUGH HIS NAME HAS NOT APPEARED IN THE SOVIET PRESS SINCE THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF HIS "RESIGNATION" FROM THE POLITBURO WAS MADE. ALTHOUGH TECHNICALLY HE REMAINS HEAD OF THE SOVIET TRADES UNION ORGANISATION, IT SEEMS IMPROBABLE THAT HE WILL KEEP THIS POST. A POSSIBLE STRAW IN THE WIND WAS HIS ABSENCE FROM THE WFTU BUREAU MEETING IN BAGHDAD ON 23 APRIL. AS IN THE CASE OF VORONOV AND SHELEST, WHO WERE RETIRED FROM THE POLITBURO IN 1973, SHELEPIN'S POLITICAL ECLIPSE IS LIKELY TO BE TOTAL; HIS ERSTWHILE COLLEAGUES WILL WISH TO DEPRIVE HIM OF ANY REMAINING SOURCE OF POWER WHICH MIGHT ASSIST A COME-BACK IN THE FUTURE. THEY MAY NOW BE HOPING THAT, WITH SHELEPIN'S REMOVAL, THE RUN-UP TO THE CONGRESS WILL BE FREE FROM FURTHER CASUALTIES AMONG THEIR RANKS. BUT THERE IS ALWAYS THE POSSIBILITY THAT IT MIGHT TRIGGER OFF A PREMATURE CONTEST FOR THE TOP LEADERSHIP. THE
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SHELEPIN AFFAIR MAY HAVE FURTHER REPERCUSSIONS AMONG ALL THOSE SECTORS OF THE PARTY AND STATE MACHINERY WHERE HIS INFLUENCE HAS AT ANY TIME BEEN STRONG.

END TEXT. BRUCE

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